

Statement of the Honorable Nancy L. Johnson (R-CT)

Testimony before the Resources Subcommittee on National Parks, Recreation and Public Lands

Hearing on H.R. 1814, the Metacomet-Monadnock-Sunapee-Mattabesett Trail Study Act of 2001

July 25, 2001

Mr. Chairman, members of the Committee, thank you for holding this hearing today, and for your interest in this legislation.

The Metacomet and Mattabesett Trails (part of the 700 mile of the Blue-Blazed Hiking Trail System) follow a stunning path up the center of Connecticut, providing breathtaking views of Connecticut's diverse landscape. From urban centers to atop sheer cliff faces, these trails meander through the state of Connecticut before joining the Sunapee and Monadnock trails which terminate at Mount Monadnock in New Hampshire.

Unfortunately, these trails are threatened and future generations may not have the opportunity to hike along these foot paths. Currently only 25% of the trail is on publicly held land. The remainder exists on private land that depends on the benevolence of property owners. Increasing development in formerly marginal areas threatens the trail. Designation as a National Scenic Trail will enhance protection efforts.

This bill provides funding for a two year feasibility study for potential addition to the National Trails System. Yet even with passage of this bill, these trails will still not be able to receive the elevated status for another ten years. If we do not begin this process immediately, these trails may disappear.

This bill is important for all of the residents of New England. An entire trail system from the Canadian border to Long Island Sound would enable public access from the last of New England's wildest places to the most densely populated estuary in the United States. The trails afford everyone the chance to visit some of the most beautiful places in New England. As footpaths, the public is afforded a peaceful outdoors experience away from the harried urban environment.

Designation as a National Scenic Trail also ensures that these beautiful areas are receive proper environmental protections. Hiking along designated footpaths has the least impact of any outdoor recreational experience. For this reason, a change in the trail's designation is the perfect solution to public access and protection along Connecticut's Metacomet Traprock Ridge. This incredible basalt ridge is the only one of its kind in the East - you have to go out west to Wyoming to find similar geographic structures. The footpaths take the public through incredible natural communities that rare to the region. Without protection, this area could face severe environmental degradation.

In order to complete the last eleven miles to connect the Mattabesett to the Sound, several coastal towns in Connecticut (Guilford and Killingworth) have put a potential trail system into their Municipal Plans of Development and are actively buying property to create the greenway that will harbor the Blue-Blazed

Hiking Trail extension to Long Island Sound. Forty-six people showed up at a hearing I held in my district on extremely short notice demonstrating the great interest that the residents of Connecticut have in protecting these trails. These interested parties included municipal officials, regional planning agencies, hikers, land trusts and other nonprofits. In Connecticut, because we are losing so much open space to development, concerns about federal assistance and eminent domain do resonate as loudly as they do in other places.

I urge your support for this time sensitive legislation. Thank you for your attention on this matter.

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